establishments who were offering/giving better benefits to workers from the purview of the Employees State Insurance (ESI) Act; as reported in the Hindustan Times dated 20th January, 1997;

(b) whether the General Secretary of AITUC has taken exception to amendment to the ESI Act increasing the salary ceiling from Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 6,500 and termed this amendment as 'unkind act' and threatened to go on strike; and

(c) if so, the reaction of the Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (SHRI M. ARUNACHALAM): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) The wage ceiling for coverage under the ESI Act, 1948 has been revised from time to time. It was last revised from Rs. 1600/- to Rs. 3000/- per month w.e.f. 1.4.92. Since then there has been significant increase in wages. Consequently a large number of employees have gone out the ESI Scheme. The Labour Minister's Conference of Major States in a meeting held on 4.10.96 recommended enhancement of the wage ceiling for coverage under the ESI Scheme from Rs. 3000/- to Rs. 6500/- per month. The ESI Corporation which is a tripartite body comprising inter-alia 10 representatives of Central Trade Union Organisations including AITUC also considered and recommended the proposal in its meeting held on 5.10.96. The Central Government accepted the recommendation and enhanced the wage ceiling under the ESI Scheme from Rs. 3000/- to Rs. 6500/- per month with effect from 1.1.97. As such the action taken by the Government in this regard is timely and in larger interest of the workers.

Revising of rates of Royalty on Minerals

992. SHRI ANANTRAY DEVSHANKER DAVE: Will the Minister of MINES to be please to state:

(a) whether the Government have taken any decision to revise the rates of royalty on minerals;

(b) if so, the details of minerals covered

(c) whether the State Governments have been consulted in this regard; and

(d) the details of revision of royalty on each of the minerals so decided by Government?

THE MINISTER OF STEEL AND MINISTER OF MINES (SHRI BIRENDRA PRASAD BAISHYA): (a) to (d) The Central Government constituted a Study Group on 30.1.95 for carrying out detailed review of rates of royalty and dead rent applicable to major minerals (other than Coal, lignite and sand for stowing) enumerated in the Second Schedule of the Mines & Minerals (Regulation & Development) Act, 1957. The Study Group had Members from some of the important mineral producting States and also had consultation with all the State Governments before submitting its Report. The proposal for Revision of Royalty Rates is under consideration of the Government.

देश की खनिज सम्पदा का ह्रास होना

993. **श्री अजीत जोगी:** क्या खान मंत्री यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि:

(क) क्या देश की खनिज सम्पदा का निरंतर ह्रास हो रहा है;

(ख) यदि हां, तो उसके क्या कारण हैं;

(ग) देश में खनिज सम्पदा की खोज का कार्य बढ़ाने हेतु क्या कदम उठाए गए हैं; और

(घ) क्या सरकार खनिज की खोज का कार्य विदेशियों को सौंपने का विचार रखती है और यदि हां, तो उसका ब्यौरा क्या है?

इस्पात मंत्री तथा खान मंत्री (श्री बीरेन्द्र प्रसाद बैश्य): (क) और (ख) खनिज देश के ऐसे संसाधन हैं जिनका नवीकरण नहीं किया जा सकता। खनिज सम्पदा का ह्रास विदोहित की गई मात्रा के अनुपात में है।

(ग) और (घ) भारतीय भूवैज्ञानिक सर्वेक्षण देश में गवेषण संबंधी कार्य करने वाला प्रमुख संगठन है और पूरे देश में खनिजों के गवेषण के लिए इसके नियमित कार्यक्रम हैं। इसके अलावा, संबंधित राज्य सरकारों के खान और भू-विज्ञान निदेशालयों द्वारा भी गवेषण कार्य किया जाता है। खनिज रियायतों की मंजूरी खान और खनिज (विनियमन और विकास) अधिनियम-1957 के प्रावधानों